



Improving Halal Compliance in Malaysia: The Role of Motivation and Organisational Readiness for Change in Small and Micro-Firms

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ABSTRACT - This preliminary study examines the effect of motivation for change, informational assessment and readiness for halal certification compliance (ROCHC) among small and micro food manufacturers in Malaysia. Employing a quantitative approach, data were collected from 104 respondents through structured questionnaires. Due to the non-normal distribution of the data, PLS-SEM analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses. The findings reveal that motivation for change significantly predicted ROCHC, while informational assessment did not substantially affect readiness. By identifying motivation for change as a key predictor, this study highlights gaps in understanding the specific drivers that influence small and micro-firms' ROCHC. These gaps include the lack of empirical evidence on how motivations and informational assessment within the Organisational Readiness for Change (ORC) theory interact with organisational readiness mechanisms in sustaining long-term compliance. Addressing these gaps can help refine intervention strategies to better support businesses in enhancing their readiness for halal standards compliance. The findings offer practical implications for policymakers and industry stakeholders, highlighting the need for targeted interventions such as comprehensive training programs, financial incentives and streamlined regulatory processes. to enhance compliance readiness among small and micro-food enterprises (SMEs). These measures can strengthen compliance readiness among SMEs, ensuring a more sustainable and effective approach to halal certification adoption.

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INTRODUCTION

Halal certification is a rigorous process that requires companies to comply with Islamic principles and regulatory standards in the production of their product. It is both time-consuming and complex, involving stringent criteria, comprehensive audits and continuous post-certification monitoring (Assagaf et al., 2022; Nordin et al., 2022; Wannasupchue et al., 2023). Non-compliance may result in the suspension or revocation of certification, potentially leading to significant financial losses (Arif et al., 2021; Latiff, 2020). Consequently, it is essential for companies to thoroughly understand and implement Malaysia's halal standards to ensure full compliance (Abu Bakar et al., 2023; Md Rodzi et al., 2023; Saiman & Yusma, 2022).

While halal certification is essential for all businesses within the halal industry, small and micro-enterprises face distinct challenges that significantly hinder their ability to obtain and

maintain certification. These businesses often lack the financial resources, technical expertise and institutional support necessary to meet halal compliance standards (Md Rodzi et al., 2023; Ismail et al., 2021). Unlike larger corporations, which can allocate dedicated teams and budgets for certification efforts, small and micro-firms frequently contend with inadequate infrastructure, limited awareness and restricted access to halal-related training (Razalli, 2018; Oemar et al., 2022). The procedural complexity, time demands and regulatory oversight further compound these difficulties, highlighting the importance of examining how such firms can improve their readiness for halal certification (Majid et al., 2015; Elias et al., 2019; Ngah et al., 2023). However, although previous studies provide insights into critical success factors, they often fail adequately address the underlying psychological and organisational readiness required to facilitate change.

One of the fundamental elements of readiness for change is motivation at the organisational level. Motivation influences an organisation's willingness to undergo transformation, invest in compliance efforts and sustain halal practices in the long term. Without strong motivation, organisations may perceive halal certification as a regulatory burden rather than a value-adding initiative (Jo & Hong, 2023; Khuhro et al., 2019). Studies have shown that motivation is shaped by internal factors such as leadership commitment and employee attitudes, as well as external factors including market demand, regulatory pressure and the pursuit of competitive advantage (Armenakis et al., 1993; Rahi & Ahmad, 2020; Thorley et al., 2022).

Additionally, informational assessment plays a critical role in the decision-making process for halal certification. Organisations require accurate and accessible information to understand compliance requirements, evaluate their readiness and navigate the certification process efficiently. However, many small and micro-enterprises face challenges due to lack of clear guidance, the prevalence of misinformation and limited access to halal advisory services (Md Rodzi et al., 2023). This information gap can lead to hesitation, misinterpretation of regulations and delays in adopting halal practices. Thus, enhancing informational assessment can empower businesses to make informed decisions, reduce compliance costs and improve their ability to meet certification standards.

Despite the recognised importance of motivation and informational assessment, these factors remain understudied in the context of halal certification compliance, particularly among small and micro-firms. Most existing research emphasises external barriers such as financial constraints and regulatory burdens, while comparatively little attention has been paid to the internal organisational dynamics that influence readiness for change. This study addresses a critical research gap by empirically testing how motivation for change and informational assessment influence ORC among small and micro-enterprises in Malaysia. Although the ORC theory posits that these elements are key drivers, limited empirical evidence exists on their specific roles in sustaining long-term halal compliance. By formulating and testing specific hypotheses, this study aims to provide robust insights into the psychological and structural factors shaping halal compliance readiness, thereby informing both theory and practice.

The Theoretical Basis of ORC in the Context of Halal Compliance

Various models and definitions have explored ORC. Armenakis et al., (1993) introduced a model focusing on organisational members' beliefs, attitudes and intentions, highlighting the influence of interpersonal and social factors. Holt et al. (2007) expanded on this by proposing a multi-dimensional construct shaped by employee beliefs about change feasibility, appropriateness, leadership support and benefits. Individual-level readiness, shaped by personal beliefs, includes perceptions of management support, confidence in successful change implementation and overall change efficacy (Holt et al., 2007; Susanto, 2008). These perceptions may vary depending on individual interpretations of the context (Eby et al., 2000). Meanwhile, organisational-level readiness looks at collective efforts involving team dynamics, resources, communication and formal policies, which are crucial for fostering shared commitment and confidence (Bouckennooghe, 2010; Jo & Hong, 2023).

Weiner's (2009) ORC theory, widely recognised in organisational-level analysis, conceptualises readiness as a shared psychological state in which members are committed to change and confident in their collective abilities. ORC is influenced by change valence (motivation for change), task demands and resource perception which drive both change commitment and change efficacy. Research demonstrates the importance of supportive cultures, adequate resources and clear task-related knowledge in enhancing organisational readiness (Jo & Hong, 2023; Noor et al., 2022; Vakola, 2013). By focusing on collective efforts, ORC promotes group learning and coordinated action, ensuring successful and sustainable organisational transformations (Mathur et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2022). Ultimately, ORC emphasises that change is a shared process, requiring collaboration and collective resolve to transition from the status quo to a more effective future state.

The application of ORC to halal compliance in SMEs involves examining two key determinants: motivation for change and informational assessment. Motivation for change, driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, such as religious obligations and regulatory requirements (Ngah et al., 2023), influences an organisation's commitment to halal certification and compliance. SMEs with high motivation for change are more likely to invest in necessary adjustments, including enhancing supply chain integrity, training employees and adopting halal-compliant processes (Razalli, 2018; Pratikto et al., 2023). Informational assessment, by contrast, pertains to task-related knowledge and the availability of resources. Many SMEs encounter difficulties in accessing clear and reliable information regarding halal certification requirements, which can result in misconceptions or reluctance to engage in the certification process (Md Rodzi et al., 2023). Task-related knowledge is essential for SMEs to comprehend halal compliance requirements, including permissible ingredients, production processes, supply chain management and documentation procedures. SMEs equipped with sufficient task-related knowledge are better prepared to implement and sustain halal compliance practices, thereby reducing the risk of certification delays or revocation (Bohari et al., 2013). Resource availability is also a critical determinant of ORC, as it directly influences an SME's capacity to meet halal certification requirements. Common barriers to compliance among SMEs include financial constraints, a shortage of skilled personnel and inadequate infrastructure (Majid et al., 2015). Organisations with adequate resources are more likely to invest in halal training, cover certification fees, upgrade facilities and modify processes, thereby enhancing their readiness for halal certification (Kurniati et al., 2024; Effendi, J., 2023).

By integrating the ORC framework within the context of halal compliance, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how SMEs can enhance their readiness for halal certification. Motivation for change encourages SMEs to adopt halal practices, while informational assessment ensures access to accurate and relevant compliance guidelines. Task-related knowledge provides the necessary expertise to implement halal standards effectively and resource availability influences their capacity to sustain ongoing compliance efforts. A clear understanding of these determinants enables policymakers, industry stakeholders and SME owners to develop targeted strategies that facilitate the successful adoption of halal certification, thereby contributing to the overall strengthening of Malaysia's halal industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ORC for Halal Compliance in SMEs

The application of ORC theory within halal compliance remains underexplored, with much of the existing research favoring alternative frameworks such as the Technology-Organisation-Environment model (Weiner, 2020; Weiner et al., 2008). This gap highlights the need for focused research on the internal factors that predict organisational readiness for halal compliance, particularly among SMEs. A deeper investigation of these factors through the lens of ORC theory will not only address current gaps in the literature but also offer practical insights for enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs within the halal industry.

Organisational Change Motivation: Hypothesis 1

Organisational change motivation is when members recognise that the upcoming change is necessary, significant, beneficial, or worthwhile (Weiner, 2009). It is crucial for the readiness of small and micro food industries in Malaysia to comply with Halal certification. Research has shown that organisational motivation includes factors like leadership commitment, perceived benefits of change and customer demand (Holt & Vardaman, 2013; Rafiki & Abdul Wahab, 2016; Billsten et al., 2018). For example, when employees believe that top management is committed to Halal certification and understands the market benefits, they are more likely to support the change (Holt & Vardaman, 2013; Jo & Hong, 2023). Research suggests that when a company sees potential benefits, such as increased customer trust or improved product safety and market potential, it becomes more motivated to pursue Halal certification (Basir et al., 2018; Djunaidi et al., 2021; Jamai et al., 2022). Motivation plays a crucial role in both individual and organisational success. While career advancement is a key motivator for individuals, organisational objectives should align with and reinforce these aspirations (Kabukye et al., 2020; Wozir & Luo, 2020). Peer influence is equally important, as employees with a positive emotional disposition can inspire and encourage others to participate in change initiatives (Armenakis et al., 1993; Kashif et al., 2015). In the context of halal certification, achieving compliance is a collective endeavour. When employees understand and appreciate its benefits, they can influence their peers to embrace the change, thereby enhancing the organisation's overall readiness for compliance (Basir et al., 2018; Tarmizi et al., 2014; Masudin et al., 2021).

In conclusion, motivation plays a crucial role in shaping organisational ROCHC. The findings confirm that change motivation has a significant impact on readiness, suggesting that when small and micro food manufacturers in Malaysia possess a strong internal drive for change, they are more likely to take proactive steps toward compliance. However, while motivation serves as a key driver, its effectiveness is maximized when supported by external enabling factors. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Organisational change motivation significantly affects the readiness of small and micro food manufacturers in Malaysia to comply with halal standards.

Assessment of Information Influencing Readiness for Halal Compliance: Hypothesis 2

The ORC theory identifies key factors influencing an organisation's change efficacy, defined as the comprehensive assessment of the perceived capability to perform a task effectively (Shea et al., 2014; Storkholm et al., 2018; Weiner, 2009). A critical determinant of this theory is informational assessment, which involves evaluating the knowledge and resources available for the required tasks (Shea et al., 2014; Weiner, 2009). To prepare small and micro food industries for halal certification, it is essential to evaluate their level of understanding and readiness for change, including the adequacy of resources and the steps required for successful implementation (Wahyuni, 2021; Abd Rahman et al., 2017; Jaramillo et al., 2019).

a) Dimension 1: Assessment of Task-related knowledge

The evaluation of task-related knowledge refers to how well members of the organisation comprehend the functions required for change, the necessary resources and the time and effort needed (Shea et al., 2014). Small and micro businesses need to understand regulatory requirements and translate these standards into actionable steps within their unique operational environments. Identifying and ensuring support, such as funding, technological access and skilled personnel is essential for their confidence in successfully navigating and maintaining certification processes (Muranganwa & Naidoo, 2023; Rajendran & Kamarulzaman, 2019; Sukoso et al., 2022). Research shows that knowledge plays a crucial role in preparing SMEs for halal certification, improving the integrity of their products (Iberahim et al., 2016; Rejeb et al., 2023). Businesses with a better understanding of halal standards are more likely to comply and avoid risks associated with non-

compliance (Basir et al., 2018; Bidin et al., 2021). However, knowledge alone is insufficient to motivate companies to pursue certification. While some studies have reported no significant relationship between organisational change motivation and halal compliance (Sudarmiatin et al., 2020; Viverita & Kusumastuti, 2017), these findings primarily reflect the context of SMEs in Malaysia, where growing market demand for halal products and government incentives may amplify the influence of motivation and knowledge on readiness for halal compliance. This contextual distinction may explain why this present study anticipates a significant relationship between these variables.

b) Dimension 2: Resource Availability Factor

In ORC theory, resource availability is a key determinant of an organisation's capacity to implement change (Weiner et al., 2009). For small and micro businesses, securing adequate financial resources is essential to cover certification fees, facility upgrades and ongoing maintenance costs. Additionally, access to trained personnel, sufficient material resources and up-to-date information on halal guidelines is vital for successful compliance (Andespa et al., 2024; Hendayani et al., 2019; Saiman & Yusma, 2022). The overall strength of these resources determines a business's ability to obtain and sustain halal certification effectively. This encompasses both tangible resources, such as financial capital and technology and intangible resources, including knowledge and expertise (Abualoush et al., 2018; Ying et al., 2019). Organisations with sufficient resources are better positioned to manage change, as they can allocate resources efficiently and maintain compliance over time (Anatan & Nur, 2023; Hussain & Papastathopoulos, 2022). Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that resource availability positively influences an organisation's readiness for change, particularly in domains such as digital financial innovation and halal food supply chain readiness (Hussain & Papastathopoulos, 2022; Muttaqin et al., 2023). Additionally, leadership support is recognised as a critical resource that enhances an organisation's readiness for strategic transformation. In the context of small and micro businesses in Malaysia, resource availability is therefore regarded as the most critical factor in enhancing readiness for halal standard compliance. Building on prior research that explores the relationship between informational assessment, specifically task-related knowledge and resource availability in shaping organisational readiness for halal standard compliance, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Informational assessment, which includes task-related knowledge and resource availability, significantly influences the readiness of small and micro food manufacturers in Malaysia to comply with halal standards.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework below outlines the antecedents of ORC and their impact on the readiness to comply with the Malaysian Halal Certification Standard in Malaysian small and micro enterprises. Organisational motivation for change is the collective motivation of the organisation as a whole to pursue change, which is supported by Weiner's theories. This theory emphasises shared beliefs and values that support the change, enhancing the overall readiness for change. The two elements of informational assessment identified are task-related knowledge and resource availability. First, a thorough informational assessment helps identify gaps and needs, enabling the organisation to address them effectively and enhance readiness for change. Understanding the specific tasks and processes involved in the change is crucial for ensuring the organisation is well-prepared. Second, resource availability assessment assesses the availability of resources (financial, human, technological) needed for change.

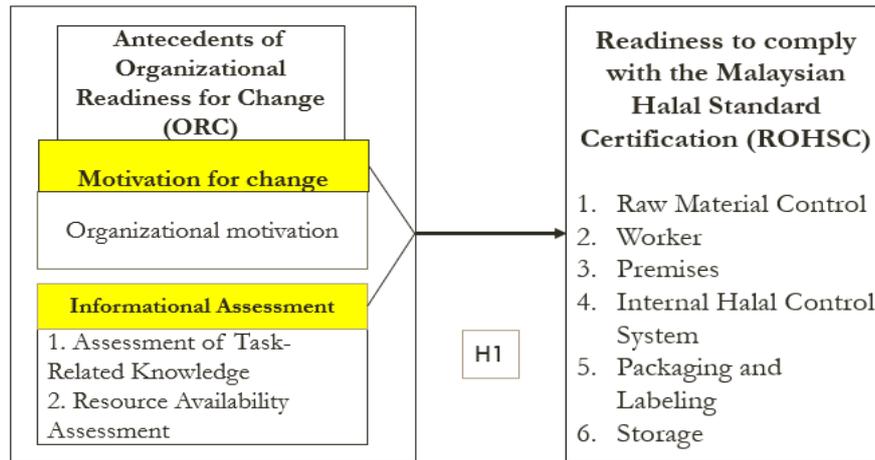


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Simultaneously, readiness to comply with the Malaysian Halal Certification Standard or ROHSC involves several crucial components that SMEs must address to achieve halal certification. These components include Raw Material Control, Worker’s requirements, Premises cleanliness and risk mitigation, Internal Halal Control, which includes the documentation and records, Packaging and Labelling and Storage and equipment. The framework provides insight into how SMEs’ readiness to implement these components is critical for achieving compliance with the Malaysian Halal Certification Standard, thereby enabling them to meet halal requirements effectively and sustain their operations within the halal market.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative research design to investigate the readiness of small and micro food manufacturers in Malaysia for halal certification compliance. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to identify key factors influencing ORC within the context of halal compliance, focusing on motivation for change and informational assessment. Based on insights from existing research, two hypotheses were formulated for testing.

A structured questionnaire was developed and distributed to 104 small and micro food manufacturers who had completed halal training in the Klang Valley, East and South regions of Malaysia. The random sampling study aimed to examine the effect of motivation for change, informational assessment and the small micro manufacturers’ ROHSC. The survey instruments were adapted from the Theory of ORC and incorporated elements from previous studies, including Jo & Hong, (2023), Shea et al., (2014) and Hannon et al., (2017). The study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring participants were fully informed about the voluntary nature of their participation.

Due to the non-normal distribution of the data, this study employs Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to estimate and analyse the structural model. The study uses a two-stage approach to estimate latent variable scores of lower-order components (LOCs) using PLS-SEM. The two-stage approach is widely recommended when the research model includes higher-order constructs (HOCs) or latent variables that require multiple dimensions for measurement (Becker et al., 2012; Hair Jr et al., 2017). These scores are then used as manifest indicators in the second stage to measure the higher-order construct in the structural model. This method minimises collinearity issues and ensures a reliable assessment of relationships among variables. It reduces estimation bias and improves discriminant validity in complex models. The two-stage approach provides a more precise evaluation of higher-order constructs, enabling a deeper understanding of factors contributing to organisational ROHSC. By adopting this method,

the study enhances the theoretical and practical contributions of the findings, ensuring that the estimated relationships reflect a more accurate representation of the constructs under investigation.

RESULT

Respondent and Organisational Characteristics

Table 1 below summarises the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the profile of the firms they represent. The sample consists of 104 participants, with 77.9% being female and 22.1% male. In terms of job roles, the majority hold managerial positions (32.7%) or are business owners (27.9%), while other positions include quality managers, production managers, halal supervisors and quality officers. Most respondents have worked in their current organisation for over 10 years (69.2%) and 66.3% of the firms are categorised as micro-enterprises with annual revenue below RM300,000.

The majority of respondents are from Bumiputera-owned firms (92.3%) and only 15.4% hold a halal certification, with 76% of firms not possessing the certification. Business location is highly concentrated in the Central/Klang Valley region (80.8%). Additionally, most firms were established between 2016 and 2023, representing younger enterprises (55.8%), with only 8.7% having started before 2001.

Table 1: Organisation and respondent profile

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	%
Sex	Male	23	22.1
	Female	81	77.9
	Total	104	100.0
Position in Firm	Business Owner	29	27.9
	Manager	34	32.7
	Quality Manager	15	14.4
	Production Manager	13	12.5
	Halal Supervisor	13	12.5
	Quality Officer	9	8.7
	Others	1	1.0
	Total	104	100.0
Years Worked in the Organisation	<1 year	9	8.7
	1-3 years	2	1.9
	3-5 years	9	8.7
	5-10 years	12	11.5
	10+ years	72	69.2
Total	104	100.0	
Annual Firm Revenue	Below RM300k	69	66.3
	RM300k - RM15M	35	33.7
	Total	104	100.0
Ownership Status	Bumiputera	96	92.3
	Non-Bumiputera	8	7.7
	Total	104	100.0
Halal Certification Status	Halal Certificate Holder	16	15.4
	Non-Certificate Holder	79	76.0
	Former Holder	9	8.7
	Total	104	100.0

Business Location	Southern	9	8.7
	Northern	2	1.9
	Eastern	9	8.7
	Central/ Klang Valley	84	80.8
	Total	104	100.0
Business Start Year	< 2001	9	8.7
	2001 – 2005	2	1.9
	2006 – 2010	9	8.7
	2011 – 2015	12	11.5
	2016 – 2020	29	27.9
	2021 – 2023	29	27.9
	2024	14	13.5
	Total	104	100.0

Assessment of the measurement model

During the assessment of the measurement model, four key criteria were evaluated: indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019) (See Figure 2).

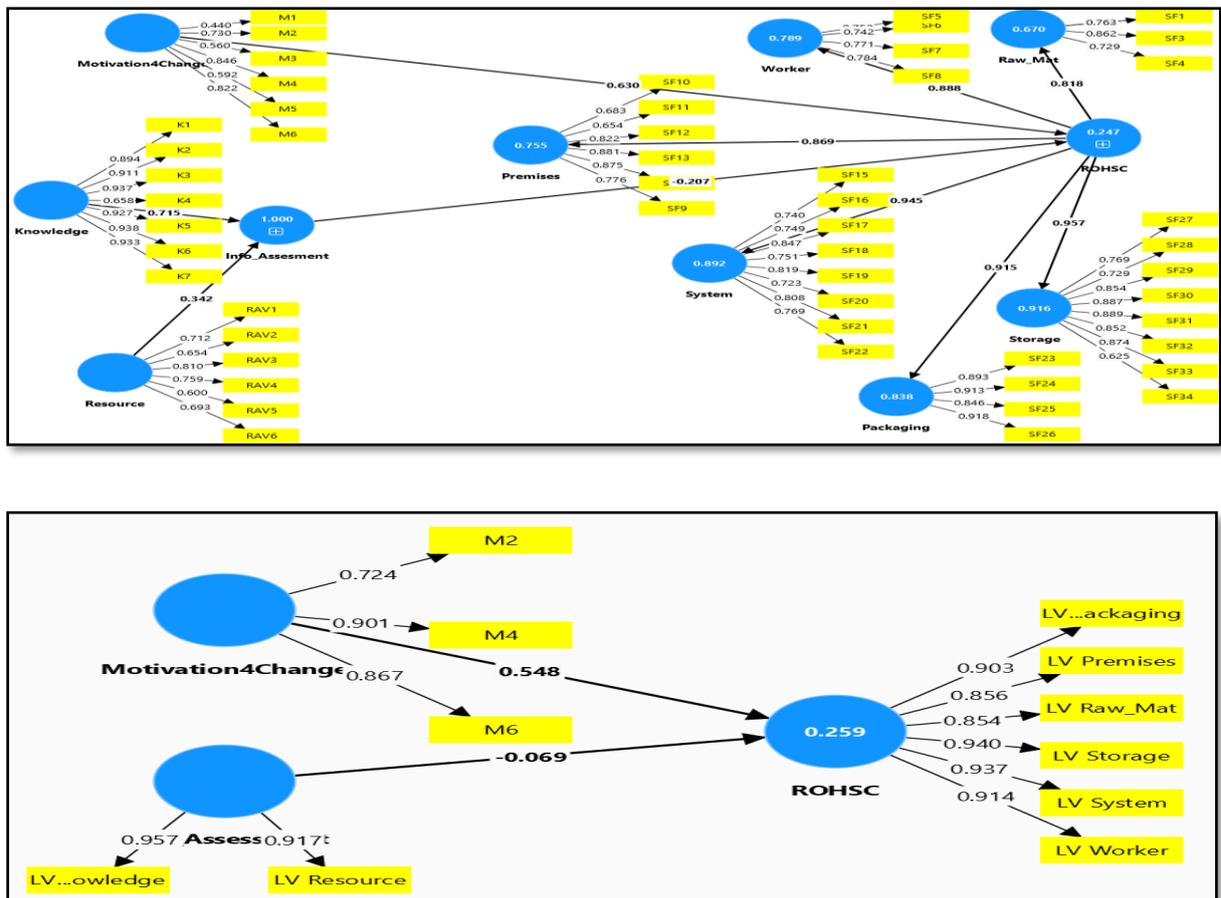


Figure 2: Measurement model using Two Stage Approach

For indicator reliability, three measurement indicators were removed due to low factor loadings, while the remaining indicators demonstrated factor loading values above the recommended threshold of 0.708 (Hair et al., 2017), ranging from 0.724 to 0.957 (see Table 2). Internal consistency reliability was assessed using composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha. Both

measures share the same threshold values, where 0.60–0.70 is considered “acceptable for exploratory research,” and 0.70–0.90 is regarded as “satisfactory to good” (Hair et al., 2019). The results showed that composite reliability and Cronbach’s alpha values ranged from 0.781 to 0.954, indicating excellent internal consistency reliability. Then, convergent validity was evaluated using the average variance extracted (AVE). The results revealed that all constructs had AVE values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.50, ranging from 0.696 to 0.813. This confirms that each construct captures more than 50% of the variance from its respective indicators, thereby establishing adequate convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 2: Construct validity and reliability

Construct	Indicator	Loadings	Cronbach’s Alpha	AVE	CR
Motivation	M1	Delete	0.781	0.696	0.872
	M2	0.724			
	M3	Delete			
	M4	0.901			
	M5	Delete			
	M6	0.867			
Informational Assessment	Knowledge	0.957	0.865	0.879	0.935
	Resource Availability	0.917			
ROHSC	Raw Mat	0.850	0.954	0.813	0.963
	Worker	0.911			
	Premises	0.856			
	System	0.939			
	Packaging	0.905			
	Storage	0.942			

Discriminant validity was evaluated using the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations, as recommended by Henseler et al. (2015). This approach is considered more robust than the Fornell-Larcker criterion for assessing discriminant validity, particularly in cases where indicator loadings on the construct show slight differences. The results of the analysis indicate that all constructs exhibit HTMT values below the threshold of 0.85, suggesting no concerns regarding discriminant validity within the model. Table 3 presents the HTMT analysis results, ranging from 0.283 to 0.763 and outlines the validity and reliability of the constructs.

Table 3: Discriminant validity using HTMT ratio

	Info_Assessment	Motivation4Change	ROHSC
Info_Assessment			
Motivation4Change	0.763		
ROHSC	0.283	0.573	

Assessment of structural model.

Following the assessment of the measurement model, which confirmed the validity and reliability of the constructs, the structural model was evaluated. This stage focused on examining the significance and relevance of the relationships among the constructs within the model. To estimate the path coefficients representing the hypothesised relationships, 10,000 bootstrap samples were used. To assess the direct effects of the proposed relationships, hypothesis testing was conducted using the structural model. The results are summarised in Table 4.

Hypothesis 1: Change Motivation and ROCHC

The findings indicate that motivation has a significant positive effect on ROHSC ($\beta = 0.548$, $p = 0.001$). The bootstrapped confidence intervals (BCI LL = 0.293, BCI UL = 0.722) further confirm

that the effect is statistically significant, as the confidence interval does not include zero. Additionally, the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.675$) suggests that motivation explains a substantial portion of the variance in ROHSC, with an effect size ($f^2 = 0.253$) indicating a moderate to large impact. Therefore, H1 is supported, reinforcing the crucial role of motivation in driving halal compliance readiness.

Hypothesis 2: Informational Assessment and ROCHC

Conversely, informational assessments do not exhibit a significant direct effect on ROHSC ($\beta = -0.069$, $p = 0.214$). The bootstrapped confidence interval (-0.205 to 0.082) includes zero, confirming the non-significance of this relationship. Furthermore, the effect size ($f^2 = 0.004$) is negligible, indicating that informational assessments contribute minimally to explaining variance in ROHSC. As a result, H2 is not supported, suggesting that informational assessments alone may not be a key determinant of halal compliance readiness. These results highlight the differential impact of motivation and informational assessments on readiness for halal compliance, underscoring the need for targeted interventions that emphasise motivational factors to enhance compliance behaviour.

Table 4: Hypothesis Testing Direct Effect

Hypo	Path	Coeff.	T Values	P Values	BCI LL	BCI UL	R ²	F ²	Supported
H11	Motivation → ROHSC	0.548	4.294	0.001	0.293	0.722	0.675	0.253	Yes
H12	Informational Assessments → ROHSC	-0.069	0.793	0.214	-0.205	0.082		0.004	No

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the factors influencing organisational ROCHC. The results indicate that change motivation is a significant predictor of readiness, with a strong positive effect ($\beta = 0.548$, $p = 0.001$). This suggests that organisations with a higher level of motivation for change demonstrate greater readiness to comply with halal certification standards. A key implication of this finding is that motivation for change plays a fundamental role in driving readiness for compliance. When organisations are internally driven and perceive the benefits of halal certification such as market expansion, consumer trust and efficacy adherence, they are more likely to have the readiness to take proactive steps toward meeting halal certification requirements. This aligns with the ORC theory, which posits that organisations are more likely to commit and effectively implement change when it is meaningful and aligned with their objectives.

Additionally, the substantial coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.675$) underscores the strong explanatory power of motivation in predicting organisational readiness. This indicates that motivation alone accounts for 67.5% of the variance in readiness, highlighting its critical role in shaping organisational readiness. The study suggests that policymakers and industry stakeholders should motivate small and micro food manufacturers through awareness, incentives and structured training programs, while also implementing external support mechanisms for certification adoption and compliance.

In contrast, informational assessment did not exhibit a significant direct effect on ROCHC ($\beta = -0.069$, $p = 0.214$). This finding suggests that merely gathering and evaluating information about halal certification does not necessarily translate into organisational readiness. One possible explanation is that while firms may successfully collect and analyse relevant information, they might lack the necessary capabilities, self-efficacy, or resources to convert this knowledge into concrete compliance efforts. This aligns with previous studies indicating that even when SMEs

possess sufficient awareness, they may still delay certification due to other challenges, such as resource constraints or inadequate socialisation efforts (Utami et al., 2022; Zakaria et al., 2022; Santoso et al., 2021). Moreover, with adequate staffing or funding, other factors like organisational culture and communication strategies may be necessary to achieve successful change (Sharma et al., 2018; Trenergy et al., 2021).

The relationship between informational assessment and readiness may be more complex than a direct effect suggests. Informational assessment may exert its influence through indirect pathways, requiring specific conditions such as organisational training programs, leadership engagement, or regulatory incentives to transform information into readiness. For example, organisations that conduct thorough informational assessments may identify compliance gaps, but the process of addressing these gaps through training, resource allocation, or external intervention may be the true driver of readiness. Future studies should investigate these mediating or moderating factors to better understand how informational assessment contributes to organisational preparedness for halal certification compliance.

Overall, these findings emphasise the importance of motivation factors in driving organisational ROCHC. While motivation serves as a strong foundation, aligning it with task-related knowledge and resource availability is critical in ensuring sustained compliance efforts. Policymakers and industry leaders can leverage these insights by developing targeted training programs, offering financial incentives and strengthening regulatory frameworks to support a smoother transition toward halal certification compliance. By addressing both motivational and structural challenges, a more enabling environment can be created for small and micro food manufacturers to achieve and sustain halal certification.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the importance of motivation for change as a critical factor influencing ROCHC among SMEs. Conversely, informational assessment, while theoretically relevant, did not have a direct impact on readiness in this model. However, this does not imply that informational assessment is unimportant; rather, it suggests that its influence may be indirect. Future research should explore the role of mediators or moderators that could clarify the relationship between informational assessment and ROCHC. Therefore, perception of resource availability perception crucial, it should be considered alongside other elements of change management to fully understand an organisation's readiness for halal compliance.

Despite its valuable contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research focuses on small and micro food manufacturers in Malaysia with a relatively small sample size and only on a few regions in Malaysia, specifically the Klang Valley, East and South regions. This may limit the generalisability of the findings to other areas, particularly those with different levels of halal awareness or regulatory environments. Future studies should consider a larger and more diverse sample, including businesses from other regions such as Borneo and the North, to enhance the robustness of the results. Second, the study examines a limited number of constructs, primarily focusing on motivation for change and informational assessment under the ORC framework. While these factors are essential, other potential determinants such as channel communication and training may also play a critical role in shaping halal compliance readiness. Expanding the conceptual model to include these additional constructs could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing organisational readiness. By addressing these gaps, future research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive readiness for halal certification, ultimately supporting SMEs in achieving compliance and enhancing their competitiveness within the halal market.

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